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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

OES TO AARON SALZBURG, NEA/ELA TO SCHALL

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [SENV](#) [ECON](#) [PGOV](#) [EAGR](#) [PBTS](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: THE WELL RUNS DRY FOR WATER MINISTER: DEBATE OVER
WATER RESOURCES LEADS TO CABINET RESHUFFLE

11. (SBU) Key points:

-- The March 11 appointment of Mohamed Nasr El Din Allam as Minister of Irrigation and Water Resources (MoIWR) highlights the fight over limited water resources, pitting agribusiness against environmental scientists and government officials who are encouraging conservation and better planning of new farms and housing developments.

-- Senior officials at MoIWR told us that the former minister's opposition to unchecked agricultural development in the desert and current water usage policy led to clashes with the Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture Abaza.

12. (SBU) COMMENT: The environmental sustainability and economic feasibility of the new agricultural projects outside the Nile Valley and Toshka city is still unclear. The appointment of an academic with no managerial experience from outside of the hierarchy of the MoIWR or the GOE-funded Water Research Center hints at an effort to mute the ministry's criticism of the PM and Abaza's plans to greatly expand agricultural lands in the desert. END COMMENT.

13. (SBU) On March 11, Prime Minister Nazif appointed Mohamed Nasr El Din Allam, a professor of civil engineering at Cairo University, to the position of Minister of Irrigation and Water Resources (MoIWR). Former minister Mahmoud Abu Zeid resigned in early March, citing health and personal concerns for his early departure. However, several senior officials at MoIWR told us that Abu Zeid's opposition to unchecked agricultural development in the desert led to clashes with the Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture Abaza over the last year. The PM and Abaza sought additional quotas of water for irrigation to support new agricultural projects in the Western Desert, and supported the construction of the planned city of Toshka, despite significant criticism from environmental watchdog organizations, and concerns about cost overruns (septel). Our sources at MoIWR note that Abaza is pushing for a drastic reallocation of water for irrigation to newly reclaimed land. On March 26, Abaza stated in the press that traditional agricultural areas in the Nile Valley (approximately 6 million feddans) consume 80 percent of water allocated to irrigation and produce only 55 percent of the total agricultural production in Egypt. He claimed that the newly reclaimed agricultural lands already produce the remaining 45 percent of total production and will continue to be more productive.

14. (SBU) In the last year, Abu Zeid spoke out publicly against the development of El Sallam Canal and Toshka city, indicating that both would overtax Egypt's water resources, and claimed that Egypt had already reached the "water poverty limit," which jeopardizes food security. Minimum water sufficiency is defined as one thousand cubic meters of water

to produce enough food per person per year. Water poverty is defined as failing to reach this minimum per person. Water scientists estimate that Egypt is currently down to 650-700 cubic meters per person per year.

15. (SBU) After his appointment of Allam to the MoIWR, the PM stated that "fresh blood" at the ministry would generate new ideas for addressing the GOE's plan to develop half a million new acres of arable land for farming. He added that this vision required an additional 9 billion cubic meters (bcm) of water. Per a 1959 agreement with Sudan, Egypt's portion of Lake Nasser water, its main source of water for irrigation, is 55.5 bcm per year, but USAID notes that Egypt is already drawing close to 60 bcm per year.
SCOBAY